FORESTRY

Bulgarian foresters are unanimous to deplore the unbusinesslike manner in which the magnificent forest domains of the country have been treated as well as in the irrational way they have so far been exploited. The lack of interest shown in this branch of national wealth may be gauged from the fact that though a quarter of the country's surface was covered with forests, yet until 1930 almost the totality of the lumber needed for building purposes was imported from abroad and it was only by imposing a very heavy duty on foreign timber that imports from abroad were reduced by 4/5 in 1931 and an impetus given to local lumber industries. According to the official statistics the total area covered by forests amounted to 2,698,000 hectares in 1933, of which 321,000 hectares were coniferous and 2,297,000 hectares deciduous, (mainly oak and beech) while ownership was apportioned as follows:

State	644,000	hectares
Monasteries	42,000	"
Municipalities	1,484,000	"
Private	528,000	"

The principal varieties of trees found in Bulgaria are — The oak, ash, elm. Extensive forest of resinous trees are to be found also in the Rhodopes, Pirrin and the Rila mountains and they are mostly composed of the varieties: Pinus sylvestris, pinus Austriacus, picea fectinata and picea excelsa.

According to M. D. Vessov's book on Bulgarian forestry, the State and municipal forests represent a capital of 20,000 million leva. About 20% of the total area of the country is covered with forests, this sylvan area being mostly mountainous and not fit for any other cultivation. If the forest were rationally exploited a yield of

313 137 six million cubic metres of rough wood per annum could be secured, and as the average price it fetched was 500 leva per cubic metre for conifers, 200 leva for beech or oak, and 50 leva for brushwood and loppings, a minimum yearly revenue of one milliard leva could easily be reckoned upon, though eventually as much as six milliards annually might be secured, a sum which seems somewhat exaggerated, since official statistics show that the State receives less than a hundred million and the municipalities 150 million leva annually from their forests. There is therefore a tremendous amount of leeway to be made up. For the year 1931 it was reported that the State forests supplied 571,000 cubic metres of wood and that their upkeep costs about 60 million leva. The main cause of neglect was the absence of transport facilities and lack of capital. The primitive saw-mills in work were too wasteful, from one cubic metre of wood only 50 % was turned out as lumber, while with modern machinery the wastage would not surpass 30 %, besides the planks sawn were of uneven thickness and did not compare favourably with those imported from abroad. M. Vessov finds that so far the concessions given to small traders for exploiting the forests have proved ruinous, as the concessionaires cut down the trees without discrimination. They usually had also to contend with the hostility of the local population and failed owing to their inability to secure enough labour. An attempt was made to create co-operative societies among the inhabitants of forest districts, but owing to their lack of means and the unsympathetic attitude of the official foresters, they do not seem to have been very successful. They generally launch into undertakings altogether beyond their resources, attempt extensive clearings, and then being unable to transport the felled wood, leave a large percentage of it to rot. The main reason for their creation was to satisfy the cravings of certain political par-

tisans and hangers-on and as a consequence these societies have not manifested any co-operative spirit so far. The State has derived no profit from them and they have been combatted alike by capitalists and the forestry personnel. According to the official statistics there were in 1932, 702 such co-operative societies engaged in forest exploitation, their roll of membership was 8,492, their capital 15,805,640, funds 8,202,908, deposits 5,929,955, capital invested in sawmills 15,787,715. They owed 10,736,478 to the Agricultural Bank and 14,981,228 to private traders. According to a recent decision of the government, the State will assume the exploitation of the forests for its own account, in view of the unsatisfactory results obtained so far.

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According to this author, the best form of exploiting the forests has been that of granting large concessions to societies possessing adequate capital, and as an example the exploitation of the Rila forests was cited which has proved exemplary. Another successful enterprise organised by the State with the help of the compulsery Labour Corps was that of the Titsa domain, south of Varna, in which the State had invested some 29 million leva. M. Vessov considered that it was indispensable to increase the means of transport in order to develop the timber industry and permit it to compete with foreign imported timber. He recommended that cattle should be rigorously prevented from grazing in the forests, a desideratum which unfortunately cannot be fulfilled because the population of the mountainous districts has no other grazing lands; his suggestion, however, of curtailing surreptitious felling of trees, by rendering compulsory the sawing of all wood in controlled modern saw mills built outside the forest areas, seems a judicious one and worth considering, owing to the vast amount of contraband which takes place.

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An interesting paper was read by M. Taslakov in February 1933 at a meeting of the Society of Bulgarian Economists, from which the following data are worth quoting: 35% of the timberlands consisted of heavy forests and 65% of scrub forests. From the former an annual yield of 1,008,000 cubic metres of prepared timber for building purposes could be secured, the price of which was 2000 leva per c. m. or some 907,200,000 leva, while the output from the latter would amount to 2,600,000 c. m. fit only for fuel and priced at 125 leva and would attain 325,000,000 leva. The revenue from forests would therefore reach 1,232,200,000 leva per annum,

The forests contained 50% oak, 25% beech, and 25% various conifers. The annual arboreal growth per hectare of beech was 3·6 c. m., of oak 2·8 c. m. and of the conifers 6·2 to 6·6 c. m. The total arboreal growth available for felling would be estimated at 10,294,380 c. m., half of which would cover the local requirements and the balance would be available for export.

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There is another highly interesting book on Bulgarian sylviculture by M. Ch. Gruev, who was a forester and consequently fully qualified to write on the subject. His exposures of the abuses committed by successive Governments in the administration of forests, constitute a most damning indictment of the pseudo-democratic form of government so far extant and show to what extent politicians are responsible for the annihilation of the forests and how they contributed in demoralising the people by their cynical disregard of the law. The only conscientious Minister in the charge of the forest domains were D. Christov, who was a member of the Gueshov Cabinet during 1911—1912 and the Agrarian leader Draghiev. He speaks highly also of Stambulov who passed excellent measures to preserve the forests, but unfortunately under his successor, Stoilov, everything was undone. He nar-

313 fluences in order that the forests might be efficiently protected and he advocated the militarisation of the foresters as the best way of achieving this aim. The grazing of [137] cattle in the great timber forests accounted for their gradual deterioration and transformation into stunted brushwood. This was due to the shortage of pasture land, of which there was only enough for feeding four million head of cattle, while the number of cattle in Bulgaria was fourteen million. The requirements of this head of cattle is about five million kilogrammes of fodder, 4/5 of which is supplied from the forests, the foliage of the trees being used as such. Goats did the greatest harm, there were 250 of them per thousand inhabitants in Bulgaria, 750 in Greece, 150 in Serbia and 25 in Rummania. By these ratios one could also gauge the relative condition of the forests in these countries.

132 731 The gradual decrease in local precipitation which is of such importance to the cultivator, as well as the resulting inundations, with the appaling destruction they cause in the fertile valleys, all of which may be traced to the unchecked felling of the forests has begun to make itself felt. We thus find deputy N. Terkalanov declaring in the Sobranye on December 11, 1928, that the yearly loss from drought could be reckoned as amounting to a reduction of the crops by 180,000 tons of cereals, 20,000 tons of industrial cultures, 10,000 of vegetables and 100,000 tons of fodder, of a value of two milliard leva. The loss caused by drought during 1934 was estimated at five milliard leva, though the harvest was an average one. Big losses were also incurred through inundations, the river Kamtsia alone caused damage amounting to 3·5 millions annually.

313 134 Travellers in the Balkan regions cannot help noticing how vast expances of once fertile land are getting buried deep beneath tons of rubble and sand, sent down by